

TIVERTON CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION

Regular meeting minutes: September 26, 2007

1: **Call to order**

Chairman Cecil Leonard called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm at the Tiverton Town Hall.

Members present: Laura Epke, Diane Harris, Bob Koohy, Cecil Leonard, Frank Marshall, Ray Medeiros, Deb Pallasch

Members absent: Stanley Zeramby, Richard Joslin

2: **Approval of minutes**

Amendment to the minutes noted by L. Epke.

Motion made by R. Joslin to approve minutes as amended for Sept. 12, 2007.

Motion seconded by R. Medeiros. Motion passed unanimously.

3. **Receive comments from invited groups/individuals**

a. Town Administrator:

Administrator Glenn Steckman gave the commission an overview of how the budget process currently works. Some items that Mr. Steckman recommended be considered while we are addressing changes to the charter and Financial Town Meeting (FTM) include:

- Addressing paragraph 503.1 to more clearly define the roles of dept. heads to lessen their involvement once the budget has been crafted and forwarded to the Budget Committee. (Possibly address in Budget Committee section as well).
- Shorten the current 10-12 week hearing process.

Mr. Steckman noted that approximately 65-70% of the town's costs are contractual, with a total of about 80-85% fixed. He will confirm the total fixed amount at next meeting.

b. Town Treasurer:

Mr. Amarantes noted that he prefers no radical changes to the charter for the FTM. Believes the current method simply needs fine-tuning with possible quorum changes and the Council and Budget Committee sitting as "grand committee." Mr. Amarantes discussed the importance of the Unreserved Fund Balance as it relates to the town's bond rating. Current rating is A2 and

Mr. Amarantes feels change will maintain and possibly improve this rating. In this regard, he had the following recommendation:

- To amend section 310 to increase the percent of the current operating budget to be maintained in the Unreserved General Fund from 3% to 6% by 2009. (Note that debt is considered part of this calculation) See attached.

c. Board of Canvassers:

Recommendations re: the FTM from this Board included:

- Decreasing the required electors for a quorum from 301 to 101
- Section 307(a) be modified to request a vote by ballot if 1/5 of the electors make the request (would replace majority must request). Would then parallel state law, Title 45-3-20.
- Move FTM from Wed. night to Sat. during the day, which would potentially increase turnout
- Council or Town Clerk makes final decision on where the FTM will be held
- If commission decides to recommend something other than the FTM, the Board of Canvassers would favor a “referendum” type of proposal, but first preference would be to fine tune based on recommendations above.

7. Public Input

Motion made by D. Pallasch and seconded by L. Epke to move item #7, public input, to next item on the agenda. Motion passed unanimously.

Alex Cote:

Mr. Cote believes that the FTM should be tweaked but not replaced totally. Mr. Cote would also like to see the following change to the charter:

- Some type of non-binding referendum be allowed to be placed on the ballot by electors for anything going into the Industrial Park or any other item for which the electors feel the Town Council should seek the guidance of it's citizens on before making a final decision.

Brain Medeiros:

Please see detailed proposals prepared in writing per attached. Recommended changes were regarding the following:

- Financial Town Meeting replacement – 95% of town already not participating. Risk of emotions ruling logic at FTM.

- Municipal and School Contracts require public hearings
- Two-year terms for all elected bodies – Poor candidate involvement over last few elections for Budget and School Committee.
- Town Council access to all resumes and interviews for dept. head hirings.
- Town Treasurer and Town Clerk be made full-time positions – Not spelled out currently.

Peter Moniz:

Mr. Moniz recommended that we review whole charter to determine if anything needs attention. Noted that charter should be current and a foundation for governing not a detailed description of operations.

- Would like to see 1 or 2 options for replacing the FTM presented to the electors. Recommended that we review surrounding town charters to see how they operate.
- Town Treasurer should be appointed not elected
- Clarify Town Administrator should select dept heads, with Town Council making policy.

4. Report from Calendar Subcommittee

L. Epke and F. Marshall presented calendar of meeting dates for the various boards and commissions.

Discussion ensued with regard to whether meeting twice per month would be sufficient to achieve our goals. Motion was made by L. Epke and seconded by B. Koohy to begin meeting weekly in January with the exception of the 1st Wednesday of the month.

Motion to accept calendar with modifications based upon the more frequent meeting schedule above was made by D. Pallasch and seconded by B. Koohy. Motion passed unanimously. See attached.

5. Reports from members and discussion of other town budget methods

Brief overview presented by members of their selected town, with the exception of R. Joslin, who will present his overview at the next meeting. As several members selected towns with an existing FTM, discussion ensued as to whether it was Commission's intent to present a modified FTM or a completely different alternative. The Chair to contact the Town Solicitor regarding the issue of presentation and report back at the next meeting.

6. Publicity report

R. Joslin distributed articles as published in the Newport Daily News and Fall River Herald. C. Leonard, Chair, noted he would prepare a letter to the editor for the Sakonnet Times, per R. Joslin's suggestion.

8. Other Business

Commission members gave approval for C. Leonard and D. Pallasch to revise invitation letters based upon tonight's discussion and begin mailing.

9. Adjournment

The Commission's September 26, 2007 regular meeting was adjourned at 10:00 pm.

Minutes recorded and compiled by Deborah Pallasch, Secretary.